

Lands That Were Golden

II. The Two Old Wests

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IF THE regions of Trans-Appalachia had been content to play the rôle of colonial dependencies to the masterful East, they would not now be regions in the new sense of the word. They have never for very long been so content. No matter what currents of opinion may pull them temporarily this way or that, in the end the telling force is the spirit of their own Hesperian lands and not the distant voices that, however clamorous, are still very distant, and often very strange. The destiny that shapes them is in part the compulsion of present desire, which changes somewhat with the times and men; but it is also the fulfilment of a history which to the Easterner of today must often seem as remote and almost as exotic as American history to an Englishman. The factual details of that history are well known; but it is nearly always presented as "national" history or "state" history. There has been little systematic attempt to isolate and interpret the history of the regions *as regions*, and to make it bear upon their present bias in matters cultural and economic. That, to be sure, is a difficult and hazardous undertaking, but until it is attempted, the relations between New York and the hinterland will continue to rest on a false basis.

The land beyond the mountains was populated originally by streams of migration from an East which

at first was only too eager to say "good riddance", and to sell off, at a profit, lands in which persons no less eminent than Washington and Franklin were speculating. Of the various streams, the Southern one, which broke through the mountains into Kentucky and Tennessee, was the earliest. Indeed, at first it peopled the Northwest as well as the Southwest, and the states of the Old Northwest bear even today the marks of the powerful Southern invasion which was nearly a conquest. But the lands of the Western Reserve and other places attracted New England settlers, too; and after the defeat of the Indian tribes, the advance of men from New England and the Middle Atlantic states began in earnest. The Old Northwest attracted a fairly heterogeneous population: Yankees, Pennsylvanians, late-coming Germans, Southerners, and others. But the Old Southwest was homogeneous: it was settled almost entirely from Virginia and the Carolinas.

The first of American Wests, while exhibiting everywhere, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, the characteristics of a single "frontier region", alike in customs and problems, which united under the leadership of Jefferson or Jackson to force its needs upon the attention of a reluctant East, was nevertheless from the beginning two Wests: a Southwest and a Northwest. The cleavage between North and South, on a line roughly indicated by the Ohio river, began very early. The Old Southwest represented a western transplantation of the political economy of Jefferson and the agrarian culture of the Old Southeast: that is, it included yeoman farmer, planter, and Negro slave, repeating in outlines sometimes cruder, sometimes

bolder and more magnificent, the mixture of democracy and homespun aristocracy, of free labour and slave labour, that marked the equilibrium of the social structure from the Potomac to Charleston. The Old Northwest, at the outset a region of independent and highly Jeffersonian farmers, from which slavery had been excluded (technically, though not always actually) by the Ordinance of 1787, also developed an early interest in the commercial and manufacturing economy of the Old Northeast; but not until Douglas broke with Buchanan in 1857 did this interest become dominant and seal Northeast and Northwest in the political alliance which has constituted, to the Southern view, the "North" of 1861-1934.

He who would understand the regions today must find a way to visualize the old differences of origin as they affect present circumstances. He must remind himself that the states of the Old Southwest—Kentucky, Tennessee, and their neighbouring states of the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi basin—are decidedly Western and yet remain Southern; and that the states of the Old Northwest—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the states beyond—while in a sense Northern, retain, or in fact cherish, a Western antagonism to the East as firm as that of their Southern neighbours, and sometimes more intense. Although the Virginian of 1934 may sometimes unconsciously patronize his fellow-rebel west of the mountains, the two, as "Southerners", have a sense of unity and comradeship that will be lacking between a New Yorker and a Chicagoan, or a man from Springfield, Massachusetts, and one from Springfield, Illinois. A Bostonian who ventures no farther west than Ohio may

be surprised to discover that even there the word *Yankee* is not always a complimentary epithet. In the South, indeed, the saying is that if you want to make a Middle-Westerner mad, call him a Yankee. As one goes farther west and south or west and north, either into the very self-conscious New Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona) or the New Northwest, or the region of the coast, one is forced to realize that these younger regions (which are nevertheless old enough to be regions) are successive realizations and new adaptations of two geniuses that were from the beginning different.

Just how different are they, and how did the difference come about? Before answering such questions one must firmly disengage himself from certain fictions. Although the pioneers out of sheer material necessity sometimes put on leather breeches and built log cabins after crossing the mountains, they did not, as the Eastern legend would have it, by such acts immediately transform themselves into a new and singular human species. The notion of Western crudity, though superficially justified in a few particulars, is largely an Eastern rationalization of the East's own claim to superiority and power, and was already antiquated when Andrew Jackson entered the White House. The men of the Western waters, like the Eastern men, were eighteenth-century Americans who brought with them, almost intact, the only civilization they knew. They had no sooner arrived in the wilderness than they proceeded to set up again (much as the Englishman of the story put on his dress suit in the jungle) the manners, schools, churches, and political and economic instruments that they were used

to. If anything, out of sheer excess of demonstration, they rather exaggerated these at first, somewhat to the horror of the East, which, in spite of the Revolution, was still not sure how far it really believed in democracy. The adaptation of the pioneers to the new lands and the differentiation of the regions came later, when the transplanted traditions had time to encounter the new situation. All the pioneers came seeking lands that were golden; and to all the pioneers the ownership of land — the only “real” property — was the prime condition of the liberty that everybody was talking about. All alike, too, had to conquer and dispossess the Indians, and deal with French, Spanish, or English occupation on their borders.

But the golden lands themselves, north and south, were different; the mastery and division of land took place in different ways; and the enemies were quelled, and the land was settled, under different conditions.

To reach Kentucky and Tennessee the pioneers had to cross the widest parts of the Appalachian range, itself a massive barrier that was also a kind of roadway, an actual wilderness serrated here and there by valleys and finally opening into limestone basins, like the Blue Grass of Kentucky and the Middle Basin of Tennessee, which in turn gave way to broken lands, everywhere heavily forested, that levelled gradually into plains or delta.

The genius of this land was in its great irregularity and variety, which both invited and repelled in its changing profile of mountain, plateau, hill, valley, plain, and swamp. It more or less enforced self-sufficiency and isolation upon settlers and settlements that were secluded by the very contours of the land.

The process of settlement was achieved, on the whole, rather by infiltration of families and individuals than by planned colonization. The Southern pioneers looked for their own land of Canaan and found it, in spite of the will of the home states rather than by their help. Their early tendencies were decidedly separatist. Before and during the Revolution they were improvising governments of their own, like the Lost State of Franklin in Tennessee, and but for the distant possessiveness of the home states on whose reputed territory they settled, the original states might well have numbered fifteen (or with Vermont, sixteen) instead of the famous thirteen. The improvised "states", when headquarters got alarmed, quickly gave way to quasi-counties, and after some years of quarrelsome agitation, to acknowledged states of the Union.

Another characteristic of Southwestern settlement was the irregular diffusion rather than the ordered concentration of the population. The cause of this was largely the Southern land policy, laissez-faire if not haphazard, which gave the best lands to first comers, and the worst to the last. Eighteenth-century Nashville was a negligible cluster of cabins on a river bank; but over many square miles around it were dispersed the isolated cabins, or "stations", or sometimes the veritable mansions, of highly individualistic persons who in literal Jeffersonian manner preferred the dangers of lonely dwelling to the corruptions of town life.

What these men were achieving was as far beyond the ken of the Federalists of 1790 as the doings of their children are lost upon the New Federalists of 1934.

LANDS THAT WERE

Among Eastern statesmen it seems that only Thomas Jefferson understood, or half-way understood, the Western democrats who were quite truly "conquering the wilderness" and making continental America a reality. The Indians of the South were no more stubborn and dangerous than the Indians of the North, but they were less nomadic, more solidly planted. At no time did the Southwestern pioneers receive substantial help in their Indian-fighting from the government at Washington. No Revolutionary heroes were sent to lead them. No organized expeditions were sent from an Eastern headquarters to aid them. In their land it was individual settler against individual Indian; or it was hastily organized bands moving from Watauga or Nashville against Indian strongholds. It was frontier armies under frontier leaders like Sevier and Jackson that broke the Indian power in Tennessee and Alabama. The man of the Old Southwest quickly learned (what he was already disposed to believe) that in an emergency he would have only his own and his neighbours' valour to count on. The Federal government was so little a help and so much a hindrance that Sevier and Robertson at one time intrigued with Spanish governors, thus initiating a policy later to be called "Southern imperialism" and "cotton diplomacy".

Thus the spirit of the Old Southwest, which connected liberty with free-hold of land, also meant from the beginning that one defended one's own substance by one's own valour. By such valour (call it acquisitive if you will) the Southwest in general was extended and mastered. Save for the opening of New Orleans, little good came to the Southwest from the

Louisiana Purchase (which in the long run, in fact, worked against its interest) or from any similar governmental manipulation. What the Southwest won, it forced from the Federal government, or took from other governments, as it took Texas and the lands farther west from Mexico, in wars not highly acceptable to the Eastern standpatters.

The upshot of this long schooling was that to the Southwesterner all governments, and especially the Federal government, seemed not only external, but foreign, stupid, obstructive, slow. From such a government concessions might be wrung by loud protest or shrewd political manoeuvre; but for the protection of a man's substance and liberty, government did not compare in efficacy with the valour of one's own arm. In his suspicion of government the Southwesterner became more Jeffersonian than the Jeffersonians, and to this day he remains so. His valour, developed at times to the point of sheer pugnacity, became a habit which has had its fatality as well as its glory. For fifty years the Old Southwesterner fought Creeks and Cherokees on the eastern side of the Mississippi; and then, for another fifty years, he fought Apache and Comanche on the western side. Unaided by Federal troops the men of the Old Southwest fought the British at King's Mountain and New Orleans. Let it be noted that in both these battles they killed the commanding officers of the enemy forces and either captured or wrecked the opposing armies. During the same years, upon a little more provocation, they would almost as cheerfully have fought Virginia or North Carolina. Under Andrew Jackson they invaded and took Spanish Florida, in a manner shocking to the

Monroe administration, which was ponderously and (to the Southwesterners) quite incredibly arranging to *buy* that territory. Under Sam Houston, who had been governor of Tennessee, a Southwestern army captured the dictator, Santa Ana, routed his army, and reduced him to a comic-opera figure. Under William Walker, the "grey-eyed man of destiny", they filibustered and fought in Central America. At last, under the Confederate flag, they fought the armies of Grant and Sherman in the fiercest battles of all. By these, for the first time in their experience, they were ultimately defeated. For what it was worth, they had the satisfaction of knowing that the defeat was inflicted by armies composed largely of Northwesterners — men of their own breed — and led by Northwesterners; whereas Jefferson Davis, who had too grievously "gone Virginian", seemed incapable of discovering the Andrew Jacksons who ought to be leading Southwestern armies. After the War, they were at it again, with Ku Klux bands, night riders, feuds, and combats of every description.

The modern régime, apparently so substantial, offers very insubstantial foes to a man habituated to a fighting tradition. It is harder now to see one's enemy clear. The Southwesterner, so many times rebuked of late by persons who are careful to remain at a safe distance, seems to be in the predicament of John Crowe Ransom's Captain Carpenter, who in the poem of that title is heard—

*Asking in the grimmest tone
If there was any enemy left to fight.*

Yet the heroic tradition, if such it may be called,

does not signify merely a blunt application of force, for it is as much a matter of spirit as of tactics. It means intensity of conviction, frankness of love or hate, above all an unwillingness to submit one's integrity to abstract dictation or to taint it with even the shadow of disloyalty to what one holds dear. These are emotional rather than intellectual qualities, and it would be proper to say that the Southwesterner's experience, backed by his land, his climate, his *mores*, turns the balance of his temperament toward the religious rather than the ethical, the intuitive rather than the logical, or, if you please, toward humour rather than wit. This does not mean that he has no intellect. He would swear that a man might be intelligent, or even wise, without being, in a certain sense, "intellectual". It does mean that he has little capacity for being intellectually disinterested. He must take sides, he must be a partisan, though surely not with any loss of chivalry and generosity. But doubt runs against his grain. He cannot so disprize human nobility as to surrender to scepticism. He can hardly concede that human nature is so wholly good or so wholly evil that it can be perfected or controlled by cold instrument of law. Collectivism, under whatever name, is bound to be incomprehensible to him. He cannot visualize a collective mass or have much notion of the class struggle in a world which to his eyes is a loose collection of individuals who must prove their worth to gain his respect. The putative good of society for him is something not to be discussed apart from the variable and breathing entities whom he knows as Cousin Tom, Uncle Dick, Brother Harry. He will follow to the death a leader who captures his imagination; but an

elaborate theoretical scheme is likely to encounter in him a divine intractability that is one part sense of humour, one part suspicion, and one part refusal to concede that any external power has the final right to determine his coming and going, his doing or not doing. These are old American traits, cherished in the South, and magnified in a Western atmosphere. They make the Southwesterner poor material for a labour union or a farmer's co-operative, and not much better material for a trade association, though it ought to be said that he takes responsibility much better than he yields it.

The social reformer will see these traits as faults. They are stigmatized as backwardness. The frank cultivation of a free personality (unless couched in Freudian terms) is analyzed as a sloppy refusal to be efficient. In fact, it might as well be granted that the Southwesterner is not always a good manager. His farm land has often suffered erosion; his cabin on the hill, or his mansion in the valley, may be a little ramshackle, like his state government and his religion, which he simply does not bother to patch up. He is defective in the calculating principle, whose advent in the modern world Edmund Burke bewailed at the very moment when the Southwest was vigorously springing to life. Yet to instruct him in calculation (as New York wants to do) would certainly destroy the magnificence of spirit in which the Southwesterner has waged war for his convictions without reckoning the cost to himself. The penalty of the Southwesterner's participation in the War between the States was a destruction and impoverishment from which he has not yet recovered; and because of which he still

cherishes a remarkably uncalculating resentment that does no good whatever to the tourist trade. The penalty of anti-evolution laws and Ku Klux performances (outbreaks of valour, perhaps, confused under modernism) has been a great outgushing of public opprobrium upon his uncalculating head. Other regions, more calculating, have hardly risked as much for their convictions. Would they? Will they ever? The Southwesterner waits to see. Meanwhile it is worth noting with what uncalculating devotion he follows the banner of Huey Long or Bilbo or Talmadge. Beware of using, too lightly or assuredly, the word demagogue. Is it possible that these leaders win him because they are men of deeds, and not stuffed shirts? Let the East look into that matter before it condemns too utterly. There is a Western principle of choice involved here which has had a meaning in American affairs.

Certainly, to the Irresistible Forces of modern times, moving, it would seem, in obedience to laws so hidden and obscure that even the calculators are amazed — to these forces, said to require prostration, the Southwesterner opposes a still dauntless breast. It will not be easy to convince him that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness can be reduced to such pale equivalences as are represented in statistical tables. Not for such equations was he born of Highland Scottish or English blood. Hardly can he, of all men, be expected to keep a straight face before such hieroglyphics. Only for manners' sake, and that in very high company, will he refrain from laughter.

What do such abstractions mean when he strides away from office or field, with the sun on his shoulders, and looks at the hills, whose every fold in the

blue distance both hides and discloses lands that are still golden, whether one seeks them for refuge or adventure. Here, though there be old battlefields at every step, or new highways riving the green with a scurry of motors, no fatality broods, but every prospect invites with the notion that happiness is not only pursuable but tangible. One has only to pitch his house on a fair piece of rising ground, in a grove of oaks or hackberries, and happiness is already touched. Let there be a fence around the grove, with a gate that opens upon a boxwood walk leading to a high-columned porch. And between fence and road let there be a pasture for the horses, with a creek flowing in it, and limestone outcroppings, and iron-weed scattered about (who cares?) and blackberries in the fence corners. Let there be fields of corn to left and right, and beyond them a high hill, well forested, a range for turkeys only half tame, and for 'possum and 'coon that are wholly wild.

This is perhaps only a Kentucky-Tennessee version of happiness and liberty located and made real. But in one form or another, with the details changed only a little, it represents the eternal desire of the Southwest: location, elbow-room, a citadel, a family hearth. This is the stand from which he watches the approach of the Irresistible Forces. Before this he has heard of invaders bloodthirsty and invincible, and he is impressed only to the extent of reflecting that it has been a while since he has had a good fight. What do the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, or the Planned Economy, have to do with the unconquerable irregularity of his nature, or with the mighty land unrolling, as ungovernable as himself, from the Great Smoky

Mountains to the Father of Waters and the Staked Plains? But let them come on, if they will, and he will be ready with his rampart of cotton-bales and mud, and his line of rifles that do not miss. Let no man think that there are no modern equivalents of these rude defenses. Already, to Secretary Wallace's appeal for economic nationalism, Peter Molyneaux of the *Texas Weekly* has answered:

No national policy, no matter how beneficial it may be for even a majority of the people of a country, can be squared with any humane conception of civilization, if it has consequences for one section of the country as inexorably destructive . . . as the policy of economic nationalism must be to the people of the South. Not only should not the people of any section be expected, in the name of national welfare, to sacrifice so much . . . but no nation, calling itself humane and civilized, should maintain a policy that requires such sacrifice. If the truth must be told, the South has already sacrificed too much that this policy might be maintained.

In those sentences there is already a crack of Kentucky rifles — or is it a flash of Texas Bowie knives? And sometime before Mr. Molyneaux's defiant utterance, twelve Southerners published a book, called *I'll Take My Stand*, which attacked the economic and cultural premises of the Eastern industrial programme. The twelve, without exception, belong to the country west of the mountains. Mr. Molyneaux and these men are not alone.

II

In the Old Northwest, and throughout the Middle West which is its extension, the Irresistible Forces also

move, in a tidal wave more vast and rapid than in the Southwest. In other days the Northwesterner would have met this wave with a fierce rampart, and men from Kentucky and Tennessee would have helped him to guard it. Today he builds no rampart. Yet he does not flinch from the wave. He rides it, with perfect equanimity and Western cheerfulness. When it passes on, there he is, unchangeably reposing on the bosom of his prairies. Yet his equanimity, it must be said, diminishes somewhat, and his passion tends to increase, as the meridian of social forces moves west. Near the Rockies, or in fact at almost any point west of the lake region, he is likely at times to be as obstreperous as his Southwestern brother.

If we take the Great Lakes region as a starting-point, the reasons for equanimity are visible and not in the least obscure. The golden lands into which the Northern pioneers — and some Southern ones — came are a region of plains, level or slightly rolling, originally an expanse of grassy prairie thickly wooded in the east but thinning into treeless aridity west of the Mississippi. Toward the south, in the neighbourhood of the Ohio river, the land is much more broken. This is the part that was settled from Virginia and the Old Southeast. The levelness of the northern part and the smooth nicety of contour that the occasional elevations possess are a result of the six great invasions of the glacial ice sheet in prehistoric times. The fertility of these plains, everywhere more pronounced and more consistent than in the Southwest, is due to the same general cause. In the long winters, when the winds whip down upon him with unbroken sweep from Hudson's Bay and the Pole, the Northwesterner

may reflect (for he loves to cherish odd bits of scientific lore) that an average lowering of temperature by a very few degrees would bring the Great Ice Age upon him again. That would be a really irresistible force, the thought of which makes social forces puny in comparison. But in the summer, the hot breath of the Gulf comes up with equally unbroken sweep, and he may well wonder whether the desert may not catch him sooner than the glacier. Between the two threats of fire and ice, what temper of mind serves better than equanimity?

But the Northwestern pioneers thought little of deserts and less of ice sheets. They saw rich prairie lands, comparatively easy of access, whether one came through the Mohawk Valley, as many New Englanders did, or by the Cumberland Road, or, as did the greater number at first, on the flatboats and keelboats that bore whole families down the Ohio to Hesperian landings. By the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 a path of entry was wide open to the Eastern folk — and to the commercial out-reach of New York City, which from that moment eclipsed its rivals and waxed mighty. Not only was this land easier of access than the land farther south; it was more penetrable; it was less a wilderness; in fact it was a fairly open and manageable country, where “planning” rather than ruggedly individualistic growth fitted the topographical situation.

From the beginning such planning was in the order of settlement; and planning was a good deal easier in that new country than in the old ones where it is now being tried. The Ordinance of 1787 is a startling example of “regional planning” — a thing so neatly

imagined and accomplished that it might well produce tears of envy in the harried National Planner of 1934. Unlike the Federal legislation covering the territory of the Southwest, which simply acknowledged an already existing situation, the Ordinance of 1787 laid out, for future realization, a scheme of five states, whose lands would be open for homesteading and into whose territory the importation of slave labour was expressly forbidden. This latter provision, against which the Southern elements of the Northwest chafed in vain, marked off the region from its Southwestern neighbour, and combined with climate, soil, and economic bias to predestine not only the character of the Northwest as "free soil" but its rôle in the sectional conflict of later years.

Here was the basis of what the historian calls an "American colonial policy", since it furnished a precedent for the erection of Western territories into full-fledged states. But the planning did not end there. Out of the Land Ordinance of 1795 there grew, after some argument, a fairly well-formulated policy of land division. By a quite Rooseveltian stroke, it was arranged to abash the speculator and aid the not-yet-forgotten man by offering the land in small parcels. Furthermore, the division was ultimately on a mathematical township basis, and the use, or usufruct, of section sixteen of every township was consecrated to public education.

There were, of course, ambitious colonization schemes and grandiose speculations; but they amounted to little in the end. And though the actual settlement, here as in the South, was at first a matter of the infiltration of individuals and families, the

Northwest as a whole was settled under Federal guidance, Federal guarantees, and Federal protection. Here were no valiant mushroom states or improvised republics, avowedly separatist and a little belligerent, but lusty, orderly territories growing into a pattern of statehood already cut out for them. And the Eastern government, irritated though it might be by Western clamour, never ceased to show some paternal solicitude for the Northwestern settlers in their Indian wars. The government sent General Anthony Wayne, no less, to quell the first great uprising; he brought an army recruited and trained in Pennsylvania. Later, the might of Tecumseh was broken by William Henry Harrison with an army of frontiersmen to which the Federal government added a quota of regulars and its material support. Let us not forget, too, that the men of Kentucky and Tennessee came up to help on certain occasions.

The War of 1812, which hurt New England sea-ports, was as popular a war in the Northwest as it was in the Southwest; but except for Commodore Perry's victory on Lake Erie, it was a rather dragging, unsatisfactory performance in the Northwest. The results, however, were satisfactory. It extinguished both the British and the Indian menace at one blow, and opened the lands farther west to easy settlement — and to more planning. After that, the only wars the Northwest engaged in were fought outside its own borders. They were undertaken — as the Northwest's part in the War of the Sixties was undertaken — with the strange mixture of disinterestedness and calculation which is today the most mysterious and formidable element in the spirit of the Old Northwest.

The paternal support that the Northwest won from the Federal government helped to shape its genius and to distinguish it from its Western sister-region in the South. The man of the Northwest, like his Southern kinsman, came seeking free lands; for him, too, the conception of liberty found expression in the freeholding of the most substantial form of property. But the Northwesterner learned to think — and since pioneer times has with growing enthusiasm believed — that the function of a government, especially of a national government, is to safeguard one's substance against destruction or alienation. One can of course defend his substance with his own body, and if necessary will do so vigorously. But what is a government for, if not to save you that effort? Your own strength ought to go into the substantial things that express your privateness and worth.

This notion, thrifty and reasonable, is basically a New England conception. It is Brother Jonathan's idea of a national government that is supposed to function like an enlarged town meeting. After 1820, indeed, when the gathering controversy between North and South had been smoothed away by the Missouri Compromise, the Western kin of Brother Jonathan had already begun to shape the temper of the Northwest. In the Western Reserve itself, a kind of sub-regional planning was going ambitiously forward, and the New England culture spread rapidly west and south over the plains, mingling sometimes chaotically, but more often persuasively, with the culture that came from the Middle Atlantic States or the Kentucky side of the Ohio.

The Old Dominion and others sent out the greater

number of colonists; but New England sent out more institutions. The New England influence thwarted the early Northwestern development toward county government (the Southern idea) and determined the culture of the Old Northwest as a culture of towns and townships imposed upon an original stratum of yeoman farmers, and overlaid, in our time, with a third stratum of metropolitan centres. The same genius, no doubt, laid out towns in orderly rectangular patterns, planted elms on all the streets, decreed parks and schools and libraries and churches at all the right places. It brought in the New England zest for public education and set up colleges that were Western transplantations of Harvard or Dartmouth. Above all it brought the New England economy of manufactures and trade, the doctrine of "internal improvements" at Federal expense, and the high protective tariff.

But observe what happens to this culture and its institutions in a Western atmosphere — in a plains region where few natural obstacles hinder the expansive process. Everything is tremendously magnified. New England caution becomes the very special kind of disinterestedness that is Northwestern — or now, Middle Western. That is, it develops from a deft avoidance of troublesome differences or a prevision of them, into a large and overwhelming assumption that there are no differences. The mixture of populations and traditions in the Old Northwest must have had something to do with the growth of this quality; for the Germans, the Irish, the Scandinavians, the Slavs have poured in upon the Yankees, the Southerners, the Middle States men. In the East the mixture, which

is even more diverse, now breeds a kind of cosmopolitanism; in the Middle West it becomes, among other things, Rotarianism. This is a kind of idealism, not so bad, perhaps, as its critics have painted it; but it is also a protective mask for a good deal of inward doubt. Middle-Western uniformity, so much talked about, is not a dull craving for averages, but a necessary assumption, a pure convenience of behaviour in a world where it is better to let the sleeping dogs lie.

As for Brother Jonathan's villages, they grow in the Middle West into little cities that crowd upon one another in decorous multiplication, or that grow up into metropolises. The shipshape neatness of Brother Jonathan's arrangements becomes the good order of streets that never could have started out as cow-paths, that obviously obey the principle of the surveyor's line projected across a level surface. What was Yankee handiness becomes the principle of convenience and comfort. There is no trick of convenience that these towns do not possess. There is no conceivable mechanism of Brother Jonathan's modest industrial revolution that they have not improved upon and greatly enlarged. The East thought of factory production; but the Middle West thought of Fordism and mass-production. The Connecticut Yankee got up the wooden nutmeg; but the Middle West devised salesmanship. What is Eli Whitney's lone cotton-gin beside the teeming inventions of Edison of Ohio, who might be said, almost, to have invented the idea of invention? As for public education, the Middle West fosters not only public schools but state universities gigantic beyond the dreams of Harvard and Yale. Then there is Prohibition. How could it ever have

been mistaken for simply a crass reversion to Puritanism? It was much more the transcendentalism of the latter-day Yankee saints, a perfectly logical and innocent Western attempt to unshackle man from the clogs that Emerson was always wanting to strike off. Really, that wispy creature, transcendentalism, never took a deep breath till it struck Kansas air. Poor Richard might have said: "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well." And the Old Northwest added: "And on a larger scale . . . to the last point of logic."

The capacity of the Old Northwest for magnifying, or indeed universalizing, its ideas is one of its most striking characteristics; and perhaps a dangerous one. In the sectional quarrel that finally ranged the Northwest against the South, Douglas's argument of "popular sovereignty" was good Western democratic doctrine, Jacksonian, fair, and fervent; yet it missed the temper of the Old Northwest somehow. Lincoln's argument — "This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free" — was a universalizing of the importance of free labour and free soil to the Northwest. It went beyond the New England idea, it violated the old conception of sectional equilibrium, it was the most dangerous thing that could have been said, and the one thing that made war inevitable. This statement, apparently so disinterested and yet so daring, put the South in the awkward position of a seeming moral offender. In the War itself, Lincoln, a Northwesterner, furnished political and moral leadership to a panicky East; and Andrew Johnson, a Southwesterner, succeeded him. The North's most successful military leaders were the two Northwesterners, Grant and Sherman, who dropped the polite military ortho-

doxies of the East and devised obliterating, massive, daring evolutions on a grand scale. Like the march of Henry Ford's machines, these movements were glacial, crushing, and yet somehow fervent. . . .

Upon the Prairie Plains of the Ohio country, or the Great Plains farther west, the charm of nature, indubitable enough in its enormous features, such as skies, horizons, stretch of earth, nevertheless repels man from tender intimacies. Thoreau in Ohio is as unthinkable as Wordsworth on the Congo. It is not a place for philosophical relaxation, but for the serious activity that reassures man with a sense of his individual power. On the plains one cannot imagine so casual and unserious a figure as the Southern tenant farmer who will live in philosophical toleration of an unkempt house so long as he can possess, however temporarily, one small fruitful field, and hunt, loaf, and talk with neighbours. The man of the Old Northwest is not now impressed, if he ever was, with the vastness that weighs upon Eastern or Southern visitors, or with the sense of infinite fatality that would set a Thomas Hardy to brooding. The Northwesterner is not a Robinson Jeffers, to be overborne by vastness, or a Whitman to be exalted by it. He has much more optimism than fatalism, but it is an optimism backed by Western resolution. He does not decline to look at obstacles, but he declines to believe that obstacles cannot be overcome. The defence of the Southwesterner's integrity is valour; the Northwesterner, no less a preserver of integrity, calls on his resolution to the same end. His Western faith, once more zealous and expansive than it is now, has sometimes dropped into the sentimental optimism of Mr. Babbitt or Bruce

Barton; a Western transcendentalist is bound to have his little weaknesses.

But his will, as the real armour of his integrity, endures. It is buttressed by a calm often mistaken for stolidity and by his faculty for taking a disinterested view. Vastness cannot be shut off from lonely farms whose very principle of existence calls for sociability and good nature; the Jeffersonian ideal of the independent farmer does not somehow turn out well in the Great Plains country (though nearer the Ohio or the Great Lakes it often flourishes). In the Great Plains it yields to mechanized farms, which express the will of man dominating nature rather than coming to terms with it. But from towns and cities vastness can be and is shut off. In them one may achieve comfort, and a kind of splendour, and the solid reassurance of walls, streets, houses. Vastness can be conquered, too, by machines of tremendous mobility. The railroad is an Eastern idea of mechanized transport; the automobile and airplane are the Northwestern or Western idea. New York has not yet visualized the change they are bringing about.

And so on to whatever things may be rated as good by the instrumental measurements of social utilitarianism — these things are the Northwesterner's, for they may be obtained by an effort of the will. What state leads the Union in the number of schools, roads, automobiles, and radios in proportion to population? Is it Iowa, or is it Wisconsin? The imponderables, it may be, are not to be gained by will alone. But ponderables have their importance, too. In a land without landmarks, measurement is both necessity and virtue. The imponderables cannot be measured, the pondera-

bles can be. The earth must be gashed for iron, or its surface ravaged to produce wheat, or hidden to make a city. If the result is ugliness, drought, congestion, stockyards, slums, these things, like Sherman's march to the sea, are necessary if regrettable products of the out-reaching of the Northwestern will after things that can be measured.

But how does all this fit Western transcendentalism? That is the mystery; and the Easterner will probably never understand it. Vachel Lindsay understood it. He could see the golden censers swinging over Springfield and hear a Western music in motor-horns on the Santa Fe trail. There are other Old Northwestern cities where the censers swing, or have swung: Indianapolis and Cincinnati are surely among them. If the censers do not swing so perceptibly over Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, let no Easterner therefore imagine that they are fit habitations for Decadence and Dissociation. They are Western market-places, frankly going about their business; and they know that a metropolis is dependent upon a rich and friendly hinterland.

At any rate, any doctrine, whether of art or politics, that denies the capacity of the human will to surmount obstacles, is not going to please the Old Northwesterner. It is a temperamental impossibility for the Old Northwesterner to say, "Thy will be my will". For this reason, perhaps, his religion tends to be not religion but ethical culture. He fears passivity and relaxation. It is significant that Sherwood Anderson, in *Dark Laughter*, makes one of his characters rail against the feeling of impotence that modern civilization forces upon him. The modern Southerner rejects Communism as an insult to the dignity of man. The

Old Northwesterner rejects it because it requires an almost Oriental annihilation of his individual human will — and is impractical. As for the famous radicalism of the West, that is only a continuing expression of the Old Northwesterner's idea of the function of a government. It is a habit, not a political philosophy.

Ten years ago, although Eastern critics conceded that life in the Middle West had all the appointments of civilization, it was berated as dull and unpicturesque. And life in the Old Southwest, though admittedly picturesque, if not almost too exciting, was condemned as lacking in the very modern refinements that, in the Old Northwest, accompanied dullness. There is something here to puzzle over. Is it possible that life cannot be both civilized and exciting? Ought the South to be Mid-Westernized, or the Middle West to be Southernized? These are foolish questions, which can be answered only by saying that the East is not a good judge of what is dull, civilized, picturesque, exciting, or backward in the regions it does not take the trouble to understand. The yokel and the Babbitt are Eastern myths, as difficult to isolate in flesh and blood as the European notion of what an American millionaire, cowboy, or Fundamentalist is like.

Once the two regions were outposts of Eastern ideas coming from North and South — ideas that in their earliest transplantation looked terrifying and extreme to Eastern eyes. But what once made *Western* synonymous with *radical* and *dangerous* is now conservatism of a sort that makes the new Eastern blood impatient. The outposts have become bulwarks. America must now suffer whatever inconveniences must result from having its continental bulwarks so far away from the

commercial capital on the eastern edge and the political capital on the mid-southern edge. From these peripheral spots the irresistible forces may indeed move, as they have moved before. In the Old Northwest and beyond they will have to encounter the figure of a man of English or Scottish blood, with a little German added, and a little Scandinavian maybe, and with a New England conscience to top the whole. This man has learned all too well the lessons that the Adams family and Ben Franklin have had to teach. In the great cities of the lakes, or the towns of the plains, or among the great fields of the plains, or by the rivers he stands, intent upon the massive work and the good job that he bends to his severe and yet ardent will. And in the Old Southwest a figure moves among mountains and hills, or in the deep forests or cotton lands of the Gulf, with songs on his lips, and tales of old time, and often with a gun in the crook of his arm, and a certain look in his eye like an orator's or poet's. At times he seems, like the Man on Horseback that James Truslow Adams has feared, a grim and turbulent giant — at times, a friendly companion.

But both the figures are indubitably there, perhaps immovably there, in regions that suit their being. Not soon will they cease to be the incarnations of the Old Adam, that, like Brother Jonathan in Vermont or Cousin Roderick in Georgia, make the diversity of America a permanent and an incalculable reality. To those who say, smiling indulgently, that these figures belong to a past no longer relevant, there is at least one proper answer: the answer of Santayana, who said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."